Dale C. Maley Speech at July 28, 2018 Marsh Park Re-Dedication

My name is Dale Maley

1st like to thank Mary Catherine Carter for her wonderful job organizing this event.....let's give her a round of applause !!!

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks through Central Illinois. John Marsh and his son Henry Marsh moved to Fairbury from Washington, Illinois, shortly after the city was founded.

The Marsh's created a new addition to Fairbury so additional homes could be built. As part of the Marsh Addition to Fairbury, they donated one city block to be developed into a park in 1859. In 1862, one mile west of Fairbury, the Marsh's dug down 180 feet and found coal. This set off a coal mining boom with Fairbury eventually having five coal mines.

John Marsh built his home at 200 North Jackson Street, at the southwest corner of Marsh Park. His home still stands today.

John Marsh also installed a fence around the park and planted trees in the park. He used it as a cow pasture. He did install turn-styles to allow public access to the park. John Marsh died in 1885 and his son Henry died in 1886. They are both buried in the Washington, Illinois, cemetery.

In 1896, John Marsh's wife sued the Village of Fairbury. She contended the village never improved the land into a park, and therefore ownership should return back to her. On November 9, 1896, the Illinois Supreme Court ruled ownership of the land would remain with the Village of Fairbury.

I think this lawsuit prompted our city fathers to start to develop the land into a city park. On June 26, 1903, a new band stand was built. The Fairbury Band played a 1 hour concert. This band stand was a unique design, with restrooms in the basement.

By 1928, Marsh Park had a band stand, swings, teeter totters, slides, a drinking fountain, a sand pile, tennis courts, and an outdoor oven.

50 years after the 1903 band stand was 1st built, it had decayed and needed renovation. It was converted into the restroom building we see today. The basement bathrooms was a bad idea, because every time it rained, the restrooms flooded!!

I believe that between 1953 and 1957, the steel playground equipment you see today was added. The Lions club in 1957 built the 3 pavilions, that are still standing today.

In 1957, the Blade reported 7,485 people used Marsh Park that summer.

In 1996, David Surber and other volunteers added the nice, large basketball court.

By 2017, Marsh Park had decayed significantly. The Fairbury Improvement Group decided to take on the project of upgrading the whole park.

We received wonderful support from the City of Fairbury and Prairie Lands Foundation. The Fairbury City Crew did a great job on the project, including pouring over 1,100 feet of beautiful curved sidewalks. Many thanks to Martin Steidinger and his crew!!

When we started, Marsh Park had no centerpiece attraction. We decided a new gazebo, which allowed people to walk through the gazebo would be a great centerpiece. To have bragging rights, this gazebo is 22 feet wide, bigger than the 20 foot wide gazebo in Central Park! There are 497 pieces of wood in this gazebo!

Other changes to the park included:

-New Welcome Sign
-renovated 114 year-old restroom
-built 22 foot wide gazebo
-built new band stand
-screened-in north pavilion
-added 6 new comfortable and durable park benches
-added 8 new LED pole lights
-added 1,100 feet of sidewalk
-consolidated playground equipment into 1 wood mulched area
-painted all the buildings
-added security cameras

Over 25 different volunteers probable donated over 2,000 man-hours working on this 17 week long project.

Financial or component donors included:

Prairie Lands Foundation
City of Fairbury
ACE Hardware
Livingston County Board of Realtors
Popejoy Plumbing
Koehl Bros.
Prairie Central School District
Beth Rinkenberger - barn quilt

Special thanks to these key volunteers:

-Brad Maley - including his tractor
-Mary Catherine Carter - painting
-Karen Munz - painting
-Lisa Roth - painting
-Steve Endres - gazebo building and steel doors
-Wayne Varner - gazebo building and steel doors
-John Tollensdorf - for selecting the color scheme
-Bill Cox - post hole digging
-David Slagel - erecting band stand
-Dennis Helmers - gazebo building
-Brad Steidinger - helping to deliver restroom materials and benches to the park
-Justin Olaffson of Alexander Lumber for helping on steel door design
-Kirk Leman of Aftershock Graphics for the great job on the 2 historic murals
-Thanks to Larry Ray, who takes care of the park, for his ideas on park design.

Many thanks to the other volunteers, who are too numerous to name.

Hopefully, Marsh Park is ready for another 50 years of service!

Thanks